

Experiments in Book Support

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art

SUMMARY

“Experiments in Book Support” was a joint presentation with “Opposites Attract: Magnets in Mounts” by Nora Lockshin. The book support systems and weights reviewed in “Experiments in Book Supports” were developed for the protection and ease of handling special collections during cataloging, research, presentations and conservation. The selection includes both commercially available and custom-made supports and weights. Safe book handling procedures are necessary for the long life of books. Commercial book support systems are expensive, bulky and have limited use. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, book conservation staff has developed a variety of custom supports and weights which ensure that books can be safely studied, displayed and conserved. As with many conservation and bookbinding supplies, some of the items have been adapted from objects created for other purposes.

A REVIEW OF BOOK SUPPORTS SHOWN

CUSTOM-MADE BOOK BLANKETS (AKA BOOK BLANKIES)

Book Blankies are based on similar cloth rolls that are used in many rare book libraries. They are reticulated, quilted blankets made of an Ultrasuede shell, filled with quilt batting. Book Blankies can quickly be rolled or folded, even with one hand, to support books in any position. Although they could be made of any fabric, I use Ultrasuede for the following reasons: it is handsome, washable, non-slip, has finished edges, and many colors pass Oddy testing. I make them in two different styles—blankets which conform in size to commercially available

acrylic and foam supports; and those made in pairs, in long strips to be used independently of other supports.

Style 1: Blankets for commercial book supports

Custom Book Blankies can be made to fit any acrylic cradle or foam wedge set. They will keep the books from slipping on acrylic cradles and serve to keep modular supports from moving apart from the weight of the book. Blankets cushion the books and help to keep cradles and wedges in good condition. The two blankets shown below fit a set of modular commercial foam wedges (figure 1) and an acrylic book cradle (figure 2). Both could also easily be used flat or rolled on the table, as a quick support.



Figure 1: A library reader consulting a book supported by foam wedges covered with a custom book blanket.



Figure 2: Book blanket on an acrylic, upright cradle.

Style 2: Long blanket (a pair) for use at the reading table or conservation bench

I make pairs of extra-long blankets in various heights to correspond to standard book formats. During conservation treatment, I use these to support bindings when I am performing repairs on the inside of books. They are easily adjustable and allow me to have my hands free as I work through the pages of the book.



Figure 3: A pair of long book blankets, seen folded and rolled.



Figure 4: A pair of rolled book blankets fitted together to support a book

BOOK WEIGHTS

Book weights of different shapes and sizes are necessary to keep books open for study and presentations. Light weights are also useful in conservation treatment. For example, the rectangular weight at the bottom of the photo below is helpful to put pressure on the spines of books. At the Watson Library, weights are used by readers, in offices, at scanners and in the conservation lab. Some are decorative and practical and others are wholly practical. When making leather weights I sometimes make them of patent leather, as it is easily cleanable, durable surface and attractive.

Some of the weights I use are shown in the photo below (figure 5). They include (from top to bottom) hand-sewn, shot-filled patent leather round bag weights; three various shot-filled snake weights, covered in Ultra-suede, polyethylene and synthetic fabric; a commercial weighted-tape from Rowley covered in polyethylene sheeting; and a hand-sewn, shot-filled rectangular leather weight.



Figure 5: A selection of book weights used by Dubanksy.

REPURPOSING OF COMMERCIALLY AVAILABLE SUPPORTS

The expense of commercially available book support systems and the large amount of supports needed in our libraries spurred me to look to the medical support pillow industry for items I might use as cost-effective temporary book supports. While these pillows are not suitable for long-term exhibition, they can be useful in the reading room, for library presentations and at the conservation bench. For our purposes, a pair of velour-covered Nova

memory foam, semi-roll pillows placed on top of a flannel-backed faux-leather mat, serves as a strong and compact book support system.

Shown below are the Nova package for a single pillow; two pillows sitting on the flannel side of a piece of flannel-backed faux leather (for non-skid purposes); and a book supported on the pillows (figures 6a, 6b, and 7).



Figures 6a and 6b: Nova Semi Roll Pillow, available on Amazon.com; Two Nova Semi Roll Pillows placed on a sheet of flannel-backed faux leather, flannel side up. This keeps the books and cushions from sliding and protects the book and table surface.



Figures 8a and 8b: Book cushion, front and back



Figure 7: A book supported on the Nova Semi Roll Pillows.

BOOK CUSHIONS

Recently, I designed custom, reusable fabric book cushions for the exhibition Fashion and Virtue. The prototype is shown below (figures 8a and 8b). The cushion is a modified pillow case, made of Ultrasuede. The front of the case is one piece of fabric, lined with polyester quilt batting to create a smooth surface. The back is made up of two horizontal overlapping pieces that create an opening for stuffing with loose polyester fill. A narrow rectangle was sewn in the spine area, to leave a flat padded flat area to accommodate the book spine. The stitching stopped short of the top and bottom edges by about an inch, so

it would not show when the book was installed on the cushion.

REPURPOSED EXHIBITION CRADLES

While it isn't always possible to save or re-use custom exhibition cradles, we do save some, especially the sculptural cradles made by Predrag Dimitrijevic of the Photographs Department. In order to make these more receptive to books of different sizes, they are lined with polyester felt sheeting.

OTHER SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

There are many sources of inspiration for book supports and lots of room for experimentation. I regularly look to both object patents and historical models for ideas. U.S. patents, such as the one for a Book Support are readily available through Google Patent Search. Patents tell us who invented the object and when. They provide detailed descriptions regarding the manufacture and use of the objects, as well as detailed technical drawings.

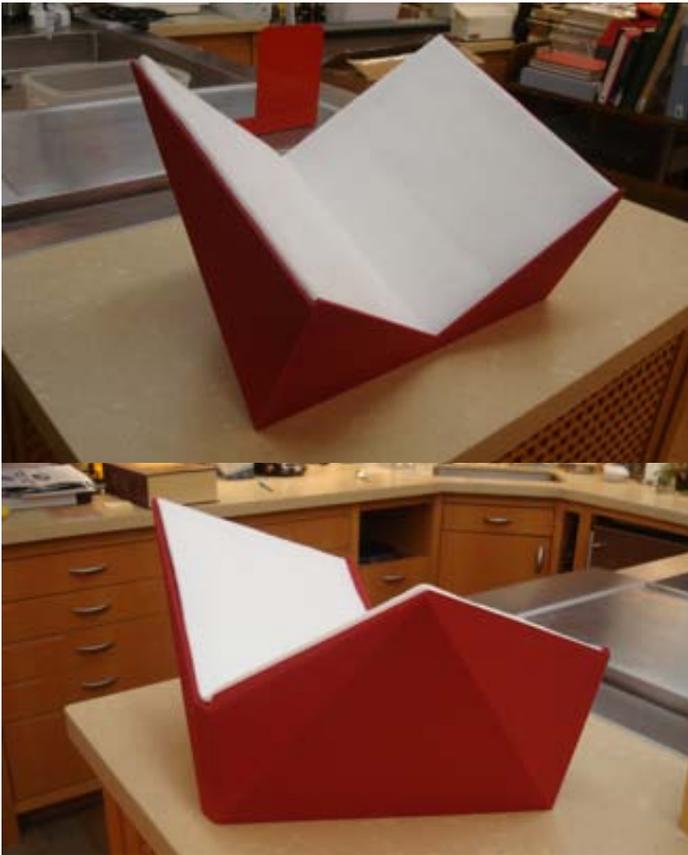


Figure 9a and 9b: Front and side views of repurposed exhibition cradles.

Historical models of boxes and supports can generate new design ideas. I was particularly inspired by this combination Indian book box and cradle, especially for its space saving features. I posted pictures of it on Facebook last January (2015) and Nora Lockshin immediately responded (figure 11). Her interest in the object resulted in the imaginative and practical prototype that she discussed in “Opposites Attract: Magnets in Mounts,” her presentation at the Folger symposium.

Mindell Dubansky added 3 new photos.
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Book people, this book box with book cradle top is a great idea. Even just the top part without the box could be a useful collapsible cradle for the reading room and lab. I hope some of you will be inspired to make some models and send pictures. I'm going to give it a try. Any thoughts simplifying it for library use?



Figure 11: Dubansky's post.

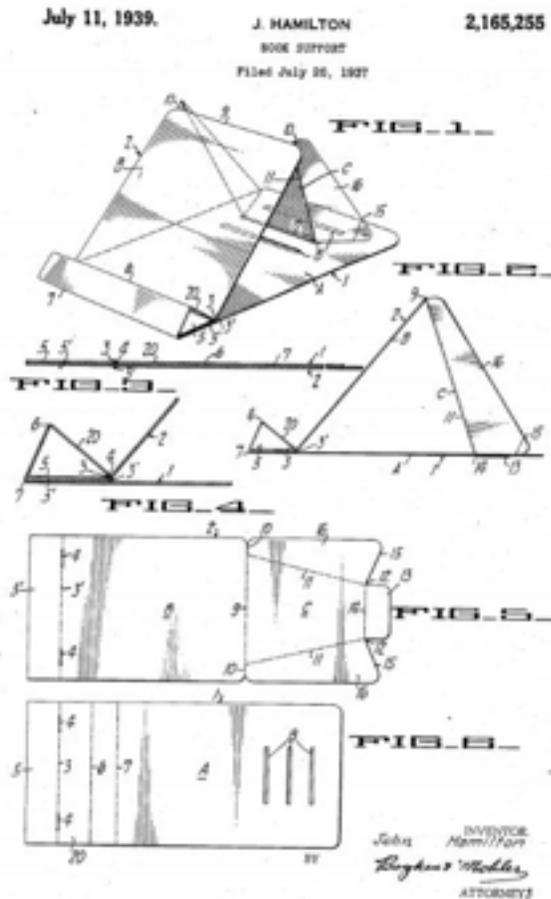


Figure 10: Sample book support patent from a Google Patents search.



Mindell Dubansky is the conservator and preservation librarian at the Thomas J. Watson Library, Sherman Fairchild Center for Book Conservation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. To see more of Mindell's book support ideas and products, visit <http://alicemorse.blogspot.com/p/purchase-rare-book-supports.html>. Contact: mindell.dubansky@metmuseum.org.